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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: San Gaban: Passing the Goal

REF: Lima 4985

1. Summary: Sunday, November 13, the COCORAH/DIRANDRO/DIRAVPOL coca eradication team surpassed the 8000 hectare mark, the goal established by DEVIDA for 2005, in the San Gaban area of southeastern Peru. NAS Director, DEVIDA officials, and the Director of CORAH visited the eradication camp in Mazuko November 15 to congratulate personnel. Eradication of nearly all the coca in San Gaban will be achieved by December 15 or before. It is probable that nearly 9000 hectares of coca will have been eradicated by year's end. End Summary.

2. November 15, NAS Director Susan Keogh and Narcotics Control Officer Fred Brems were joined by DEVIDA officials on an inspection visit to Mazuko, site of the eradication team base camp in San Gaban, near Peru's border with Bolivia. CORAH's Director Col. Jose Yale and Director of Eradication Operations Miguel Ramos joined the group in the field. The group flew to a site where nearly 200 eradicators, behind a security shield of 60 Peruvian National Police, were extracting coca plants. Some of the plants were 8-12 years old with stems like small trees (they had been cut back over the years to encourage bushiness), making eradication a slow and difficult process. Peasants ("peones") with children watched emotionally as plants with heavy yields of seeds ready for picking were eradicated. Asked by a DEVIDA official how much money she received for a bag of coca, the woman who had been working the field - probably for an absentee landlord - said she did not receive money, but rather rice and meat for her crop from the pack-carrier ("mochilero") who picked up the leaf. (Comment: Most of the people who are growing coca in this region are also producing cocaine base - it may be that this woman was not, however. End Comment)

3. On returning to Mazuko, the visitors were met by the half of the eradication team on rest standing in full formation. It was obvious to the visitors that morale was high as the assembled CORAH workers, DIRANDRO security police and DIRAVPOL aviation team enthusiastically received messages of congratulations on reaching the goal early. The 8248.43 hectares of coca eradicated represents approximately 412 million plants.

4. As of November 20, the total number of hectares eradicated reached 8248.43. As the team recently encountered young plants in the coca fields that were replanted since the last eradication in late 2004, the eradication has picked up, from an early daily average of about 25 hectares in the area of old coca to nearly 40 hectares a day, with a one day high of 55.6 hectares. We estimate a total of 8800 -----hectares of coca will have been eradicated by December 15 when eradication stops. It is hoped that nearly 9000 hectares will be reached by the end of the campaign year with the addition of the results of a small campaign in the north near Campanilla in San Martin that is slated to start in early December the end of November and will continue through the holiday period. The next large-scale campaign is planned to start in San Martin January 6, 2006.

5. Comment: Statistics show that people living in the coca growing areas are among the poorest in Peru. Those cultivating the coca are often not the owners and are exploited by those higher up on the narcotrafficking chain. DEVIDA's eradication plan for next year begins with areas of replanting insuch as Polvera-Pisana. A key part of our effort to dissuade peasants - and the owners of the land - from replanting not to replant coca will involve returning to recently eradicated areas, perhaps coming back within as few as 6 months, to re-eradicate with the possibility of Alternative Development in areas that are on agriculturally viable land. The security situation (reftel) will be a significant factor in these efforts.

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